

**Documents Guarded****Data on Tonkin Action Pondered by Senators**

By Richard Harwood

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Locked up in a safe in Room S-116 at the Capitol these days is a 20-page, top secret document that has become "must reading" for both hawks and doves in the United States Senate.

The slim report—prepared by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff—is so tightly guarded that no Senator may remove a copy from the room. No senatorial assistant is even permitted to look at it.

It deals with forbidden material: the original and highly classified Pentagon papers on what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin on the night of Aug. 4, 1964. The following day the United States bombed North Vietnam for the first time and thereby, in the language of the Foreign Relations Committee, "internationalized" the Vietnam war.

Those who have seen the document or who have obtained first-hand reports on what it is supposed to contain give somewhat different accounts of the conclusions reached by the Committee staff, under the direction of William Bader. But they agree on three central points;

1. That U.S. naval vessels—including the destroyers Maddox and C. Turner Joy—were in the Tonkin Gulf on an "intelligence mission" that fateful night in August.

2. That the two destroyers definitely were "harassed"—and possibly attacked—by North Vietnamese patrol boats.

3. That the U.S. response to the incident—the bombing of North Vietnam—was "precipitous" and based on inadequate information.

A disputed version of the Bader report has it that the United States may have deliberately provoked the North Vietnamese attack as a means of escalating the war in an

election year without going through the national debate that escalation would otherwise have required.

Whether that version is correct or not, one Senator—a prominent Republican—is using it in support of his claim in a forthcoming national magazine article that the bombing of North Vietnam was based on "the flimsiest provocation" and that the United States may have "deliberately" sought that provocation.

The Committee's study of the Tonkin Gulf events has been under way since December and is based on such top secret military documents as the logs of the U.S. ships involved, the pertinent messages that passed back and forth between military headquarters and the White House, and

other highly classified information.

In undertaking the study, the Committee was concerned with the problem of "unpremeditated wars" and how they can be avoided. It was specifically concerned with the war risks involved in intelligence-gathering operations by U.S. vessels.

Since 1964, intelligence ships have been involved in three incidents which the Committee believed contained the potential for "unpremeditated war"—the Tonkin affair in 1964, the Israeli attack on the U.S.S. Liberty last summer, and the North Korean seizure of the U.S.S. Pueblo last month.

The Committee's staff is said to have concluded in its secret report that U.S. reaction to each of these incidents was in "inverse proportion" to the seriousness of the situation.

The Israeli attack on the Liberty caused the death of 34 American seamen and was regarded by the staff as the most serious of the three incidents. But, it was noted, the U.S. response to the Liberty incident was the most restrained—a simple diplomatic

The incident involving the Maddox and C. Turner Joy, on the other hand, was regarded as the "least provocative" of the three incidents, since no damage was caused to either ship and no casualties resulted.

Nevertheless the U.S. re-

sponse, according to one version of the staff report, was to bomb "a sovereign nation" and "internationalize" what had been a "local" or "limited war."

The report is said to involve many questions not answered in the Pentagon papers or by the White House. They include such questions as these:

Why, only 10 hours after the Tonkin incident, did the United States fly 64 bombing sorties against North Vietnam when it took no military action whatever against Israel and North Korea?

What had the Maddox and C. Turner Joy done to make the North Vietnamese so "agitated" that they would attack or harass the destroyers?

Is the Administration using the "top secret" classification on the Tonkin Gulf papers to protect the national security or to "avoid embarrassment to the Administration"?

Implicit in the report, it is said, is the conclusion that the

White House and the Defense Department used the Tonkin Gulf incident as an excuse for initiating the attacks on North Vietnam and as a device for avoiding a national debate on escalation.

(A week after the bombing began, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which gave the President authority to "repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.")

One person familiar with the Foreign Relations staff report said yesterday that it suggests strongly that "if a debate had been held before the bombing whatever decision then reached would have had far greater public acceptance than what was done; it would

have neutralized much of the dissent we are hearing today."

**Fulbright Should Quit Committee, Says Taft**

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 12 (UPI)—Rep. Robert Taft Jr. (R-Ohio) today called on Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) to step down as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the interest of national unity.

Taft claimed that Fulbright's deep and publicly expressed dissatisfaction with President Johnson's Vietnam policy ran counter to what he said was the traditional cooperation that should exist between the chairman of that Committee and the White House on major foreign policy issues.